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AUTHOR Schrader, John
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ABSTRACT

Boundary breakers, the modern term for "icebreakers," tear down barriers that sometimes form within student groups and organizations, and offer a low-risk way for group members to become better acquainted. This document is a "hands on" booklet that covers such boundary-breaking activities as "Send a Letter," "The Lap Game," "One-Minute Interview," and "Spider Web." Each of the 26 activities within this booklet is supplied with a suggested age level, a purpose, an optimal group size, the time required, and a list of materials necessary to accomplish the goal of breaking interpersonal boundaries. (KM)

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By
John
Schrader

A Team Building Guide for Student Activity Advisers

EA 021 893

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Boundary Breakers

A Team Building Guide
For Student Activity Advisers

By John Schrader

NASSP Division of Student Activities
Reston, Virginia

What Is a Boundary Breaker?

Boundary breakers tear down barriers within a group. These activities offer a low-risk way for group members to get acquainted.

Boundary Breakers is a "hands on" book that will enhance your meetings at the middle or senior high level. While these activities are not dangerous in nature, please exercise proper supervision to ensure safety. NASSP cannot be responsible for any injuries that may occur.

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Division of Student Activities
1904 Association Drive, Reston, Va. 22091
(703) 860-0200

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Send a Letter

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: This exercise helps members of your group become better acquainted.

Group Size: Limit each group to 20 participants. More than one group can do this exercise simultaneously.

Time: 10 minutes, approximately.

Materials: Chairs in a circle (one less chair than number of participants)

The letter-sender stands in the middle of a circle of chairs where all but one student is seated. The sender gives his or her name, age, hobbies, and interests then says, "I'm sending a letter to . . . ." He or she fills in the blank with a description such as "someone with green socks," or "someone with brown hair." Students who fit that description must stand up and run for an empty seat. The person left standing is the next sender.

Baby, If You Love Me . . .

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: Student leaders need to learn how to deal with rejection.

Group Size: Best suited for 25 participants.

Time: 10-15 minutes, maximum.

Materials: Enthusiastic, but controlled student involvement.

"The Original" Mike Smith of Albuquerque, N. Mex., stated this interesting fact in a workshop : "By the time you reach 18 years of age, you have received 140,000 negative comments and only 10,000 positive ones." Using this quotation, this exercise allows individuals to deal with rejection.

Boys and girls are divided into two groups, one on each side of the room. A boy or girl can start by going to the opposite side of the room, addressing one person, and saying, "Baby, if you love me you would smile for me." (Note: There is no physical contact allowed, no whispering, and only the phrases given in this exercise may be used.) If the person is able to respond—with a straight face—by saying, "Baby I love you, but I just can't smile," the initiator has been rejected and must continue until finding someone who will smile. (If a person has tried three times and has not been successful, someone else should have a turn.) If the initiator is successful, the person who smiles goes to the other side and repeats the process.

Volkswagen, or "Herbie the Love Bug"

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Develops teamwork in problem solving.

Group Size: Best suited for 20-100 participants, depending on available space.

Time: Allow up to 5 minutes for discussion of how to accomplish this team-oriented task, then allow 1-5 minutes to achieve it. If you have several groups involved in this exercise, they will be watching how the previous groups accomplish the task, and may change their method before it is their turn.

Materials: Masking tape and a clock.

Place tape on the floor in the shape of a Volkswagen Bug. Depending on the size of the group, the car can be big or small. The objective of the exercise is to get the whole group within the boundaries of the Volkswagen Bug within a specified amount of time (anywhere between 1-5 minutes). This can be done by forming any configuration that the group decides could work.

Extension Cord Confusion

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Learn to develop teamwork and problem-solving skills.

Group Size: Best suited for approximately 50 participants.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: Depending on the group, a minimum of a 50-foot extension cord. If available, a 100-foot extension cord is better.

This boundary breaker can be done by a single group or by several groups at the same time. The extension cord(s) is knotted several times. Each person within the group is asked to place one hand on a section of the cord. When everyone's hand is in place, they must untangle the cord without removing their hands.

One Minute, Please

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Developing listening and communication skills within your student organization.

Group Size: Best suited for groups of 25.

Time: 10-30 minutes. If you don't want to spend a long time on this exercise, you could do it with only two or three members at each meeting.

Materials: None.

The group pairs off—one is the speaker, the other is the listener. The listener gets one minute to find out all he or she can about the speaker. Next, the listeners reveal to the group all they found out about their partner. Now, reverse the roles.

Lap Game

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Develop listening skills.

Group Size: Best suited for 25-50 participants.

Time: 10 minutes.

Materials: Chairs in a circle.

Place a chair for each participant in a circle. The caller gives a direction to people who fit a description such as, "Everyone wearing yellow socks must move one seat to the right." The people who don't have yellow socks on stay where they are. The result of the various calls often have more than one person sitting on someone's lap.

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: To learn how to focus on accomplishing your goals.

Group Size: Best suited for 20 participants.

Time: 5-15 minutes, maximum. If you have a very large group, select 20 people to demonstrate this exercise.

Materials: 1 16-ounce or 64-ounce plastic bottle, 3 ping pong balls, and a camera. (This exercise is an excellent photo opportunity!)

The objective of this boundary breaker is to hit a ping pong ball off the top of a soda bottle using your middle finger and thumb in a flicking motion while walking by it at a fast pace. This may seem like a simple task, but it isn't. Before they begin, ask students to state their name, school, hobbies, and sports. As in achieving any goal, it usually takes more than one try to get it right. Keep trying, and you will be successful.

Ha-Ha

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: To develop teamwork and to realize that a sense of humor is an important ingredient in student groups.

Group Size: Best suited for 25 participants.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: A cleared floor.

Participants sit on the floor in a circle. The first person says, "Ha." The second person follows by saying, "Ha, ha," and then repeats what the first person said. Next, the third person says, "Ha, ha, ha," and repeats what the first two people said. This continues around the circle with each person adding a "'ha" and then repeating what each person said.

Another version of "Ha, ha" is to have each person place his or her head on the stomach of another player while lying down on the floor. This will create contagious laughter.

Purri, Purri

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: To develop listening skills, teamwork, and trust.

Group Size: Best suited for 50 or more participants.

Time: 10-20 minutes.

Materials: Blindfolds.

Select four people to act as marshals to keep people from being injured during this exercise. All other participants—except one—close their eyes or are blindfolded. The person who isn't blindfolded is the "Purri, Purri." This person is the only one who doesn't say, "purri, purri." The blindfolded students walk around the room saying "purri, purri," looking for the person who will not respond to them. When a blindfolded person finds the Purri Purri, he or she takes off the blindfold, and becomes a Purri Purri, holding the hand of the first Purri Purri. This continues until everyone is connected by hands and the entire group is silent.

Animal Farm

Grade Level: Middle Level.

Purpose: To break up cliques that may form in student organizations.

Group Size: Best suited for 25-50 participants.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: 12 index cards.

This is a fun communication game. On 12 index cards, assign an animal sound and a sign of the zodiac. Participants walk around the room making the animal noises that match their zodiac sign. Let's say that the Taurus card is assigned "pig." All Taurus participants would then say "oink, oink," looking for others making the same sound. The game ends when everyone has found his or her animal group.

Who Am I?

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: Group dynamics teach students to deal with various personalities and leadership styles in large groups.

Group Size: Best suited for three groups of 10.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: 2"x 6" tags made out of posterboard and string.

Form circles of 8-10 people each. Helpers place tags on the foreheads of participants, who cannot see what their tag says. Each group is given a problem to solve. Before discussions begin, instruct participants to treat their fellow teammates according to what their tag says. Samples include "ignore me," "interrupt me," "don't look at me when I talk," "laugh at what I say," "listen to me," "agree with everything I say," "disagree with me." The exercise ends when the time is up, or when students guess what their tags say. Conclude with a discussion about how students felt when they were treated rudely. Did any group reach a solution to their problem?"

Name That Tune

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: To break up cliques that often form at the beginning of a meeting.

Group Size: Best suited for 25-30 participants.

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Materials: Index cards with song titles.

Each person is handed an index card on which is written the title of a well-known song, such as "Jingle Bells." Participants walk around the room singing their song, looking for another person singing the same song. Once a group is fully formed, members sing one big chorus of their song. The first group to finish wins.

Lips

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: Helps participants to listen and learn to be patient when they have something to say.

Group Size: Best suited for 25 participants.

Time: 10-40 minutes.

Materials: Outrageous set of red lips.

Everyone sits in a circle debating a controversial subject. Each person is allowed to speak at any time as long as he or she is holding the paper lips. When the speaker is finished, the lips are passed to someone else.

Never Say No, or Clothespins Are Forever

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: To help participants take a positive approach to a question.

Group Size: Best suited for 25-50 participants.

Time: 15 minutes, maximum.

Materials: Clothespins.

Give each participant five clothespins. Divide participants into pairs or small groups. Invite everyone to converse, asking each other "yes or no" questions. For example, "Do you live in a house?" "No, I live in an apartment." The respondent should have said, "I live in an apartment." Whenever a "no" answer is given the respondent must give a clothespin to the questioner. The winner is the person with the most clothespins.

Sample topics of conversation include:

- ✓ Was born the same month as you
- ✓ Loves to read
- ✓ Needs a unique fundraising project (Suggest one that worked at your school.)
- ✓ Has or plans to apply to the same colleges as you
- ✓ Had a great homecoming and can tell you why
- ✓ Has the same favorite color as you

- ✓ Has attended a concert this year
- ✓ Has traveled to at least five states
- ✓ Can explain a great service project
- ✓ Was on a winning team this year
- ✓ Plans to attend a national student council convention, state or regional National Honor Society convention
- ✓ Watches soap operas
- ✓ Is an international traveller
- ✓ Can tell you three reasons why they're proud of their school
- ✓ Competed in a non-athletic contest this year
- ✓ Ran for the same office you did
- ✓ Hates winter more than summer
- ✓ Owns more than five hats
- ✓ Wears contact lenses
- ✓ Has five or more clothespins.

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One-Minute Interview

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: Helps student leaders to get acquainted and deal with impromptu situations.

Group Size: Allow only five people to be interviewed in one session.

Time: 1 minute.

Materials: A willing speaker.

Thomas Jefferson stated, "There are extraordinary capabilities in ordinary people, given the opportunity."

Ask a member to explain him or herself to the group in one minute. Speakers can talk about family, school, sports, past accomplishments, or future goals. This exercise allows both the speaker and listener to realize the importance of each person.

The List

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: This is to identify the "positive" and "needs to improve" list for your organization.

Group Size: Best suited for 50 participants.

Time: 20-30 minutes.

Materials: Paper and pencils.

Divide your organization into four even groups. Give them 10 minutes to make two lists: "Accomplishments" and "Needs Improvement." Regroup and write down the top 10 accomplishments and needs. Your group is now ready to set new goals.

Peanut Butter and Jelly

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Develop communication skills.

Group Size: 2 people perform the exercise in front of a group of 50 to 200 participants.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: One table, one chair, one jar of peanut butter, one jar of jelly, one butter knife, one paper plate, one loaf of bread, napkins, a bucket of warm soapy water, and paper towels.

Two people are selected for this exercise. One plays a five-year-old child. The other plays the child's father. The scene is lunchtime and the father is going to tell the child how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. (No demonstrations allowed.)

The Candy Store Game

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Student leaders inform their group about themselves.

Group Size: 5 individuals from a group of 20.

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Materials: Candy.

Using your favorite candy (M&Ms, Skittles, or jellybeans), ask five students from your group to take the amount of candy they want. For each piece of candy taken, that individual must state one positive fact about him or herself.

Great Balls of Fire

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: Helps students realize the importance of parliamentary procedure, *especially the* simple motion.

Group Size: Best suited for 50 participants.

Time: 5 minutes.

Materials: One dozen ping pong balls, one beach ball, and a timer.

Explain to the group that you will be throwing out 12 ping pong balls to them. They have one minute to throw them to each other. When that is over, collect the balls and throw out a beach ball for a one-minute toss. Collect the beach ball.

Explain that this activity demonstrates that nothing is accomplished when everyone is actively involved. When only one person has the floor (in this case the beach ball), the motion on the floor can be heard and debated clearly, avoiding mass confusion.

Parliamentary Bingo

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: To learn and understand the procedures of *Robert's Rules of Order* parliamentary procedure.

Group Size: Best suited for 50 participants.

Time: 30-45 minutes.

Materials: Self-designed bingo card, *Robert's Rules of Order*, and 50 prepared questions from the book with the answers. (The caller should be the one who prepared the questions.)

Design a bingo card that is blank, except for the free space in the middle. Then ask participants to number their own bingo card from 1 to 50. Now, play parliamentary bingo. Call out numbers from 1 to 50. When you get a winning card, shout "Bingo." Check the card to see if it is correct. Next, the caller will ask for each number, one at a time, and ask the player a question regarding parliamentary procedure. If the player answers correctly, he or she is the winner. If time allows, play again.

Line-Up

Grade Level: Middle Level.

Purpose: Develop good communication skills.

Group Size: A group of 15 participants is ideal, but no more than 25 participants per group.

Time: 5-15 minutes.

Materials: Enthusiastic young people.

The leader issues a command and group members line up in single file as quickly as possible. A good command to start with is, "Line up in alphabetical order." Other possible "line-up" commands include: by birthday, favorite food, height, favorite color, etc. (Be creative!) Remember, get everyone involved. It's no fun being left out.

(Source: Virginia Beach City Public Schools Elementary Student Council Association Leadership Workshop.)

Skin the Snake

Grade Level: Middle or Senior High.

Purpose: To develop teamwork.

Group Size: 15 students make an ideal snake (any larger and you have a boa constrictor).

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Materials: Energetic students in practical clothing.

Ask your group to form a single line facing forward. Participants take their right hand, and put it back between their legs, taking the left hand of the person behind them. The last person in line lies down while still holding the hand of the person in front of him or her. Each person in line then steps backward while straddling the person lying down, still holding hands, until this process has all group members lying down. The group members reverse the process and the last to lie down is the first to get up. The first person walks forward until all group members, with hands joined, have gotten up from the floor.

Spider Web

Grade Level: Middle Level.

Purpose: To sharpen listening skills.

Group Size: Best suited for 15-25 participants.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: Ball of yarn.

Ask your group to sit in a circle. One person begins the activity by stating his or name and something that he or she likes to do (e.g., my name is Mel and I like to yell). Then, while holding the end of a ball of yarn, he or she tosses the ball to someone else in the circle. That person states his or her name and gives an activity. This continues until everyone has received the ball of yarn and a spider web has been created. Next, reverse the pattern by stating the name and activity of the person who last tossed the ball. Keep going back, winding up the slack on the ball, until you reach the first person.

(Source: Virginia Beach City Public Schools Elementary Student Council Association Leadership Workshop.)

High Flying Spirits

Grade Level: Senior High.

Purpose: To develop teamwork and creativity within your group.

Group Size: 50 students maximum; 5 groups of 10.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: Index cards with group associated names on them.

Give everyone in the group an index card with a name on it that is related to a theme (e.g., Batman, Chief O'Hara, Robin, Batgirl). Participants must find other people within their theme. When all groups are formed, they must present a cheer related to their theme.

(Source: N.A.W.D. Workshop.)

Create Your Own Boundary Breaker

Grade Level:

Purpose:

Group Size:

Time:

Materials:

Description:

Source: Your Name: _____

School _____

Address _____
Street City State Zip Code

Send To: NASSP Division of Student Activities
1904 Association Dr.
Reston, Va. 22091

(We may use your idea in *Boundary Breakers II.*)

Acknowledgments

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John Schrader

About the Author

John R. Schrader, a teacher at Hanover (Mass.) High School, is the student council co-adviser. He also serves as the assistant executive secretary and travel coordinator for the southeastern Massachusetts Association of Student Councils.

He has presented workshops at the local, regional, state, and national levels. Currently, his presentations include: "Fundraising the Old-Fashioned Way: You Earn It," "Warm Fuzzies," and "Icebreaker, Icebreaker."

Today, the term for "icebreakers" is "boundary breakers." This book uses that term to highlight exercises that help student leaders break down the boundaries that sometimes form within student organizations.